

ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE FINAL CARDEN FARMS TRAILS ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

November 2020

Background

The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) completed an environmental assessment (EA) and issued a finding of no significant impact (FONSI) on March 1, 2020 for the Carden Farms Trails on the Melton Hill Reservoir in Anderson County, Tennessee. The EA analyzed the request by Aspire Park to enter into a Cooperative Agreement to construct and maintain approximately 7 to 9 miles of multi-use trails on 174.2 acres of TVA Parcel MHR-1506 (locally referred to as Carden Farms). The trails on TVA's land would connect to additional trails on private property as part of a proposed park. The proposal would add new recreation opportunities for the surrounding community. TVA's interest in considering this proposal arises from its commitment to improve the area's economic base and support sustainable economic growth and to provide recreational opportunities for the public. The proposed action under the EA is also consistent with TVA's land use plan for the area. Completed in 1999, the Melton Hill Land Management Plan reflects TVA's preference to continue to manage these parcels for sensitive resource management, which includes passive recreational use. Additionally, the request meets TVA's objective to provide the public with quality, affordable outdoor recreation opportunities.

The No Action Alternative and Proposed Action Alternative were analyzed in the Final EA. Under the No Action Alternative, TVA would not enter into a cooperative agreement with the applicant, and no trails or improvements would be constructed. The property would remain open to the public, and passive recreation would continue to occur. Under the proposed action alternative, TVA would enter into a cooperative agreement with the applicant to construct and maintain approximately 7 to 9 miles of multiuse trails. TVA selected the Proposed Action Alternative as its preferred Alternative.

Proposed Action

The previous EA analyzed the potential impacts to approximately 7 to 9 miles of multi-use trails on 174.2 acres of TVA Tract MHR-1506. The trail system also extends onto the Aspire Park property, adjacent to the TVA property. The trail system is planned to be a compliment of a new public park and trail system which is proposed adjacent to TVA's lands. Under the cooperative agreement, Aspire Park is permitted to maintain the trails on TVA property, including the proposed addition.

In April 2020, Aspire Park requested an additional trail be added to the project scope. Portions of the newly proposed trail would follow an existing roadbed approximately 8 to 10 feet wide. The new trail would be constructed within the 50-meter protective buffer of one of two culturally sensitive sites previously consulted on. TVA and Aspire Park have considered alternatives, but surrounding terrain is not conducive to trail construction outside the protective buffer. The newly proposed trail could result in indirect or cumulative effects resulting from an increase in unauthorized foot traffic within the 20-meter protective buffer around one site. As a result of the increased foot traffic and potential for adverse effects, TVA will create a vegetative visual buffer between the trail and the site.

TVA consulted with State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) based on the new findings from the April 2020 project scope request. On June 22, 2020, the TN SHPO concurred with TVA's findings and use of vegetative visual buffer as a protective measure. TVA also consulted with federally recognized tribes on the proposed undertaking. One tribe requested copies of both TN-SHPO concurrence letters. TVA provided the tribe with the letters; no other tribal comments were received.

During planting of the vegetative buffer, some trees less than 3" in diameter will be removed and, to the extent possible, all invasive species within the forested area between the site and proposed trail corridor may also be removed. Based on the size of proposed trees to be removed, consultation under Section 107 of the Endangered Species Act is not required.

Tree planting would occur during dormant season to ensure viability, as long as it creates an effective buffer. TVA Natural Resources staff will visit the trail twice a year, and TVA Cultural Compliance staff will visit the site annually to monitor for potential damage. During the Cultural Compliance annual site visit, staff will review these measures to determine if they are still sufficient.

As a final protective measure, TVA will add language to the cooperative agreement with Aspire Park, giving TVA the right to close the trail within the previously identified buffer area if any damage occurs to the culturally sensitive areas. The trail would remain closed until the vegetative buffer is restored and/or in compliance under cultural consultation. Based on the additional commitments in place, TVA finds that no historic properties would be affected by the undertaking as currently designed.

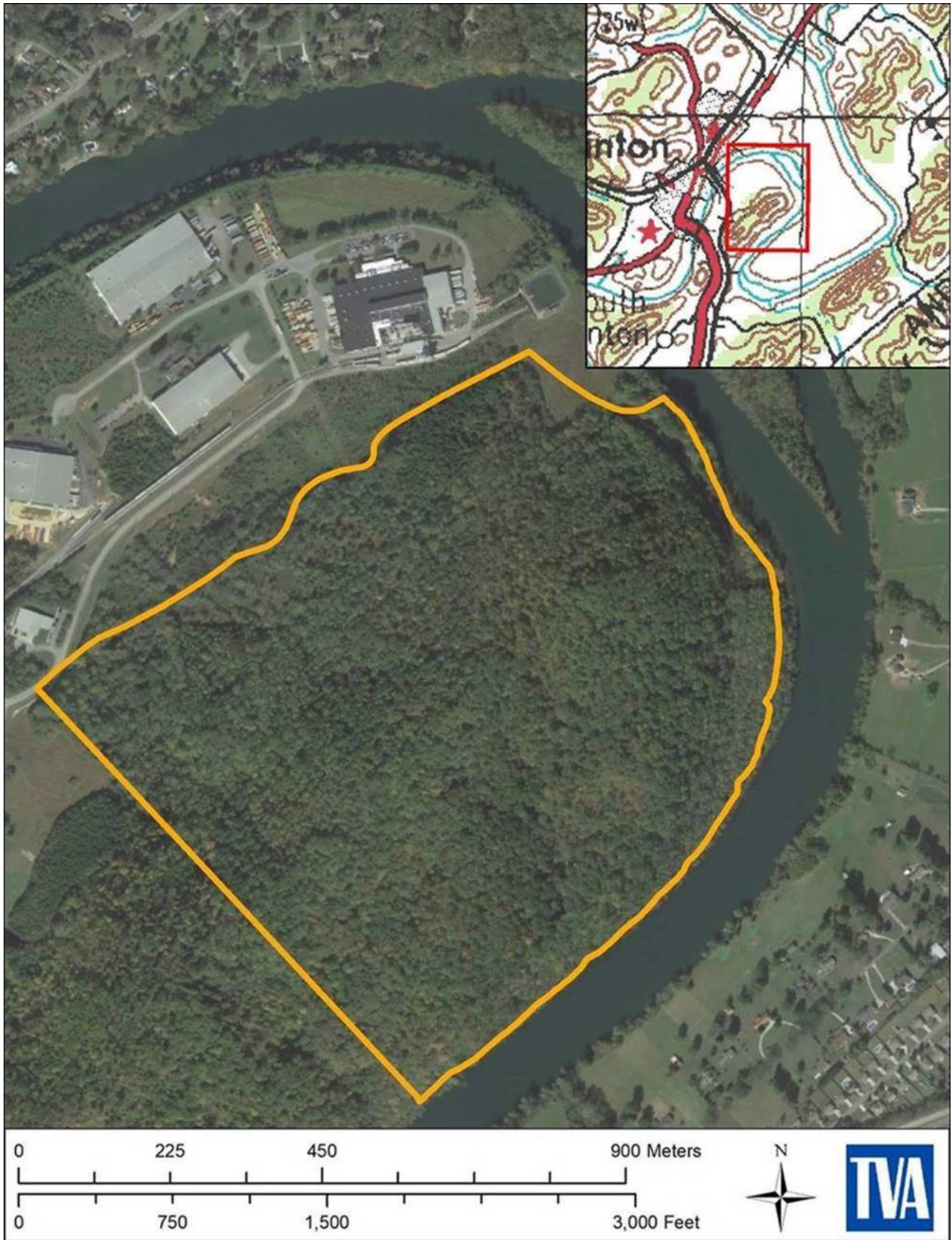
Discussion of Impacts

Aspire Park would be required to close the trail under TVA's jurisdiction and as discussed in the cooperative agreement between TVA and Aspire Park. TVA representatives will visit the site both bi-annually and annually to review mitigation measures and determine if they are still sufficient.

Conclusion

Based on the findings in this White Paper, the proposed trail and protective vegetative buffer would not result in significant impacts to the environment. Therefore, the March 2020 EA continues to be valid in impact assessments and conclusions. TVA will publish an amended FONSI based on this conclusion.

Figure 1. Final Trail Location at Aspire Park/Carden Farms



Coordination



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June 22, 2020

Mr. Clinton E. Jones
Tennessee Valley Authority
Biological and Cultural Compliance
400 West Summit Hill Drive
Knoxville, TN 37902

RE: TVA / Tennessee Valley Authority, Carden Farms Multi-use Trails, Anderson County, TN

Dear Mr. Jones:

In response to your request, we have reviewed the cultural resources documentation submitted by you regarding the revision to the above-referenced undertaking. Our review of and comment on your proposed undertaking are among the requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. This Act requires federal agencies or applicants for federal assistance to consult with the appropriate State Historic Preservation Office before they carry out their proposed undertakings. The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation has codified procedures for carrying out Section 106 review in 36 CFR 800 (Federal Register, December 12, 2000, 77698-77739).

Considering the information provided, and the avoidance commitments included in your letter, we find that no historic properties eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places will be affected by this undertaking. If project plans are changed or archaeological remains are discovered during project construction, please contact this office to determine what further action, if any, will be necessary to comply with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

Your cooperation is appreciated.

Sincerely,

E. Patrick McIntyre, Jr.
Executive Director and
State Historic Preservation Officer